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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: POLL SHOWS PROTESTS AND PROTEST LEADERS
UNPOPULAR

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary/Comment: The Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC), in partnership with the Eurasia Foundation, polled over 1,800 Georgians in May 2009 to gauge public opinion in regard to ongoing protests. The data indicated a significant negative outlook towards both the protest leaders and their aims. Among the non-parliamentary opposition, only Irakli Alasania (Alliance) and to a lesser extent Shalva Natelashvili (Labor), polled well. The overwhelming majority of the country support dialogue and reject calls for Saakashvili's resignation. Likewise, while generally supportive of the right to protest, more radical actions like blocking highways, railway stations, or streets with cells are viewed very negatively. The data indicate that any further radicalization of tactics will only serve to damage already low approval ratings among the non-parliamentary opposition. President Saakashvili and other GoG officials have not benefited from their handling of the protests meaning that the public does not view current events as a zero-sum game. GoG ratings have dropped slightly, but remain solid, although their numbers are much higher when viewed countrywide since they are less popular in Tbilisi. The data indicate that the drop is likely a result of current economic and geo-political problems rather than as an acute result of non-parliamentary criticism. The most striking figure is that 70 percent of Georgians simply want the protesters to go home, while only 5 percent of the respondents wanted the government to take forcible action to send them home. The results track with focus group data, informal public feedback, and GoG polls. CRRC has shared results with non-parliamentary leaders and GoG officials. End Summary/Comment.

Little Public Support for Non-Parliamentary Opposition Tactics:

¶2. (C) The polling from the CRRC shows that despite the continued protests within Tbilisi and beyond, the non-parliamentary opposition's message and tactics are not resonating with the public. Of those polled, 85 percent said that the government was justified in calling for dialogue and 86 percent said that the opposition was justified in calling for dialogue (Embassy Comment: Although the question was strangely worded, the data indicate that the public overwhelmingly supports dialogue. End Comment.) The polling shows that peaceful marches are also acceptable, with 82 percent saying the opposition's peaceful marches are justified. The overall trend of the polls supports less radical and peaceful options for resolution. More radical actions drew dramatically less approval. Only 20 percent said that the opposition picketing the Presidential Administration was justified, while 17 percent said creating "corridors of shame" was justified. Only 15 percent said that the opposition putting up cells and blocking streets was justified. The most radical actions, such as the planned picketing of cross-country highways and attempting to break into the Ministry of Internal Affairs building, were only viewed as justified by 8 percent and 7 percent respectively. Rather than rally the public, the numbers seem to indicate

that plans by some non-parliamentary leaders to engage in more radical action would likely only serve to drive away support. As with other focus groups and polling data, the public generally does not approve of the protests but accepts them. Dialogue is the preferred outcome and pursuing more radical aims and tactics are deeply unpopular. Qradical aims and tactics are deeply unpopular.

Resolution of the Protests - Just Go Home

13. (C) Interestingly, 46 percent of those polled expected the protests to end peacefully with protesters returning home without a negotiated settlement, while 70 percent named this scenario as their desired outcome. Only 12 percent expected the protests to end with a negotiated settlement, and 13 percent named this as their desired outcome. Only 9 percent of those polled expected the government to assert itself and eventually disperse the protesters, while just 5 percent actually named government intervention as their preferred outcome. Least popular among the options was the non-parliamentary opposition's current strategy. Only 6 percent expected the protests to continue and force the government into major concessions, while only 3 percent actually wanted that to happen. (Embassy Comment: The pollsters did not define "major concessions" allowing respondents to draw their own conclusions. Even assuming major concessions means Saakashvili's resignation, only 3 percent actually support the non-parliamentary opposition's single shared goal. End Comment.) The data clearly showed that the public neither supports nor believes that the non-parliamentary opposition will be able to force the government into major concessions, overwhelmingly preferring that the protests simply end.

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14. (C) Equally noteworthy is the attitude towards snap parliamentary elections. Of those polled, 51 percent wanted the elections to occur in 2012, as scheduled. Only 17 percent said they wanted elections to occur now and 10 percent said they want elections in the fall of 2009. Five percent said they wanted elections sometime between the fall of 2009 and January 2012. The data show that a majority of the public does not support the non-parliamentary opposition's potential fall-back position of immediate snap parliamentary elections.

Despite the fact that the majority of those polled wanted the protests to end on their own, the polls showed that the public places the majority of the burden of ending the protests on the government (46 percent). The polls said 21 percent of the responsibility in ending the protests belongs to the church, and that 25 percent belonged to the protesters. (Embassy Comment: This was another strangely worded question but highlights that although the public clearly does not support the non-parliamentary opposition's agenda; citizens still place a significant responsibility on the government to handle the protests effectively and appear to want the government to work towards a constructive and peaceful resolution. End Comment.)

Who Is Handling the Protests Well?

15. (C) Not surprisingly, Patriarch Ilia II tops the list as those performing well during the protests (75 percent rate his performance very well, 12 percent well, 4 percent neutral, 0 percent badly, 0 percent very badly). Following in decreasing order are Ombudsman Sozar Subari (19 very well, 28 well, 25 neutral, 7 badly, 3 very badly); Georgian Army (19,26,22,7,4); Georgian police (15,22,25,12,7); President Saakashvili (13,20,30,17,10); Giorgi Targamadze (CDM) (10,26,31,11,6); Irakli Alasania (Alliance) (9,24,38,11,3); Gigi Ugalava (8,19,31,15,8); Levan Gachechiladze (5,11,24,31,15); Giorgi Gachechiladze ("Utsnobi") (5,9,21,29,21); David Usupashvili (Alliance - Republicans) (4,13,34,17,9); Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way) (3,9,27,25,19) and Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia) (2,7,24,37,16). The data indicate that the

public is generally satisfied with how the GoG has handled the protests but not overwhelmingly so. On the other hand, non-parliamentary leaders with the exception of Irakli Alasania were viewed negatively as a result of the ongoing protests.

Non-Parliamentary Leaders, Ratings Plummet - Alasania Strong

15. (C) There is a significant correlation between type of participation in the protests and leaders, ratings. The polls showed that those who have abstained from the protests benefit, and conversely, with increased degrees of involvement in the protests, ratings fall dramatically. Labor Party Leader, Shalva Natelashvili who has largely remained away from the protests, saw his rating increase dramatically to 41 liking him (versus 24 in the latest pre-protest poll) and a drop in negatives from 47 to 39 percent. Participants in the protests have seen their negative numbers increase significantly. Comparing protest versus pre-protest polls reveals an obvious negative trend. In descending order, David Gamkrelidze (38 like, 41 dislike (protest - May 2009) - 39 like, 31 dislike (pre-protest - December 2008)); Davit Usupashvili (32 like, 44 dislike (May 2009) - 31 like, 30 dislike (December 2008)); and Levan Gachechiladze (26 like, 55 dislike (May 2009) - 27 like, 41 dislike (December 2008)). More radical ctors have seen their ratings fall even further. Salome Zourabichvili (16 Qtheir ratings fall even further. Salome Zourabichvili (16 like, 64 dislike (May 2009) - 22 like, 44 dislike (December 2008)), and Nino Burjanadze (13 like, 70 dislike (May 2009) - 30 like, 42 dislike (December 2008)) have seen their ratings plummet indicating that the more radical the leader, the worse the rating.

16. (C) Irakli Alasania's numbers are still strong (55 percent like, 25 dislike (May 2009) - 51 like, 15 dislike (December 2008)). Nonetheless, Alasania's negatives rose 10 percentage points while his positives only 4 points which indicates that on balance, Alasania has not benefited from being involved in the protests but likewise has not damaged his ratings. Alasania, who is widely viewed to be the most moderate of the non-parliamentary opposition, is likely benefiting from being perceived as pursuing a more moderate course. The data indicate that if Alasania does indeed pursue dialogue, he stands to gain stature; if he pursues more radical aims, he is similarly likely to see his rating drop.

GOG Numbers Holding Relatively Firm - Targamadze's Numbers Strong

16. (C) Throughout the protests, the Georgian government's

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popularity numbers have been holding steady. Saakashvili (46 like, 35 dislike (May 2009) - 49 like, 24 dislike (December 2008)), Bakradze (43 like, 36 dislike (May 2009) - 46 like, 23 dislike (December 2008)), and Ugulava (41 like, 42 dislike (May 2009) - 39 like, 30 dislike (December 2008)) have seen their negatives rise indicating that the protests have not benefited the GoG either. However, when looking at the rise in negatives with how each individual has been assessed as handling the protests, the higher negatives are likely to do with being office holders during an economic downturn rather than as a direct result of the protests. The UNM is still the party that those polled felt most positive about, with 16 percent feeling very positively, and 21 percent feeling somewhat positively. National Forum (12 very positive, 14 positive), Labor (10 very positive, 17 positive), Alliance for Georgia (9 very positive, 21 positive), and Christian Democrats (7 very positive, 23 positive) round out the other parties with significant public support. Christian Democratic leader Giorgi Targamadze is still strong, indicating that the protests have marginally affected his numbers (55 like, 27 dislike (May 2009) - 52 like, 21 dislike (December 2008)).

If Parliamentary Elections Were Held Tomorrow...:

¶6. (C) Those polled where asked who they would vote for if parliamentary elections were held tomorrow, and the party with the greatest percentage of votes by a significant margin was UNM, at 30%. The Christian Democrats received 9%, Alliance for Georgia 9%, the Labor Party 7%, and National Forum 6%. Again, the numbers are roughly consistent with the others that show significant support Saakashvili and the government, as well as those parties perceived to be less involved in the radical aspects of the protests.

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